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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

24 October 1951

SUBJECT: NIE-42: THE CURRENT SITUATION IN ALBANIA WITH PARTICULAR
REFERENCE TO GREEK, YUGOSLAV AND ITALIAN
INTERESTS AND PRETENSIONS (Draft for Board
Consideration)

THE PROBLEM

To assess the strategic importance of Albania and to examine the stability of the existing regime. Furthermore, to analyze the character and extent of Greek, Italian and Yugoslav interests in Albania, and to estimate the degree to which the conflicting interests of these powers might obstruct the effective defense of Southeastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean.

CONCLUSIONS

1. From a military point of view Albania constitutes primarily a nuisance problem in the Eastern Mediterranean. With proper development, Albania could provide the USSR with naval and air bases, but unless the USSR could establish control of other bases on the

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Mediterranean or establish overland communication from Bulgaria, it could not support naval or air forces in Albania which would be a significant threat to Western domination of the Mediterranean.

2. The present regime in Albania is under firm Soviet control and the Albanian armed forces and security forces appear adequate to ensure its continuance so long as opposition movements are not considerably more effective than at present.

3. Dissatisfaction with the Hoxha regime is widespread and has manifested itself in some overt resistance. Such resistance, however, has met with limited success, largely because of: a) the lack of coordination among resistance groups within Albania, b) the lack of cooperation among the emigre organizations in Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece, and c) the failure of any of Albania's neighbors to use their capabilities for the disruption of the Hoxha regime to the full.

4. Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece all have conflicting interests in Albania. Rivalry and distrust among these three countries over Albania is one of the factors limiting desirable cooperation of these countries in the development of coordinated defense plans in this area.

5. The establishment of a liberated Albania as an independent and sovereign state recognized by the great powers would probably

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satisfy Italy and Yugoslavia. However, such a solution would not satisfy Greece unless Greek territorial claims were at least partially satisfied.

DISCUSSION

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ALBANIA

6. From a military point of view Albania constitutes primarily a nuisance problem in the Eastern Mediterranean. This arises particularly out of Albania's strategic location at the entrance to the Adriatic. Saseno Island and the port of Valona have potential value as bases for mine craft, small naval attack craft, and submarines, which might for a short period cause annoyance to naval operations in the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. Saseno Island was a minor Italian submarine base and there have been recurrent but unconfirmed rumors in the post war years of Soviet efforts to reconstruct these facilities. There is no confirmed evidence of extensive Soviet efforts to build up Albanian air facilities and, although Albania might be of value as an outpost in an early warning system for air defense of the Soviet orbit, there is no evidence of Soviet radar installations. Unless the USSR could establish control of other bases on the Mediterranean or unless

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it could establish effective overland communication from Bulgaria, it could not support naval or air forces in Albania which would be a significant threat to Western domination of the Mediterranean. Albania would be of somewhat greater significance to a land campaign in the Balkans as operations in conjunction with Bulgaria, if successful, could isolate Greece from Yugoslavia.

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN ALBANIA

The Stability of the Regime and Extent of Soviet Control

7. Prior to the Cominform-Yugoslav rift in June 1948, Albania had been closely tied, both politically and economically, to Yugoslavia. Rather than follow Marshal Tito's heresy, however, Hoxha chose the Moscow camp and launched a vigorous campaign for the elimination of "nationalist" elements in Albania. Hoxha not only extricated Albania from its ties with Yugoslavia, but also succeeded in eliminating serious competition for leadership within Albania. Although there are reports of rivalry between Hoxha and the present Minister of Interior, Lt. Gen. Mehmet Shehu, the former apparently enjoys the favor of the Kremlin, and there appears to be little likelihood that Shehu will replace Hoxha.

8. Moscow, for its part, has recognized the importance of Albania as a pro-Soviet outpost in the Mediterranean area.

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Following the Tito-Cominform rift, the USSR increased its aid and support to the Hoxha government, replacing the support formerly received from Yugoslavia.

9. Albania is dependent upon Soviet economic support. Without it, the country's economy would be severely shaken within a few months. Soviet control rests on this dependence and is reinforced by an estimated 1,000 Soviet military and civilian "experts" in key positions in the police, military, and civilian administrations as well as in the party hierarchy.

10. With Soviet support Hoxha and Shelm have thus far succeeded in ruling the country through the usual Communist methods of police terror and rigid economic controls. The leadership of the armed forces and most of the rank and file of the security forces are loyal to the party and constitute effective instruments for the suppression of opposition.

11. Soviet support to Albania, however, has not included a formal military guarantee. The USSR, apparently in a desire to leave the situation fluid and to avoid a potentially embarrassing commitment, has failed to conclude a mutual assistance pact with Albania. ^{*/} In fact, Albania has such a pact only with Bulgaria

^{*/} Other Satellites which have not concluded mutual assistance pacts with the USSR are Eastern Germany and North Korea.

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(16 December 1947). This lack of Soviet or Satellite commitments to Albania should probably not be interpreted as indicative of lack of interest or concern but rather as a matter of expediency.

12. Any change in the Albanian situation which might threaten the present regime would almost automatically involve a question of Soviet prestige in an area in which one Satellite has already defied the Kremlin. Should a serious threat to the Hoxha regime arise, the Kremlin could be expected to do everything practicable to remove that threat. The actual Soviet reaction, however, would be conditioned by numerous factors which cannot be foreseen, including the nature of the threat and the implications of Soviet or Satellite intervention in terms of the risk of general war involved.

Resistance to the Present Regime.

13. Dissatisfaction among the Albanian people is widespread, however, and there has been some overt resistance within the past few years. The regime itself has admitted the existence of "diversionist" elements, particularly among the peasantry, and has admitted attacks upon military and civilian supply convoys. The most dramatic incident of resistance activity was the bombing of the Soviet Legation in February 1951 but, local assassinations and limited economic sabotage have probably been more effective

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challenges to Communist authority. Thus far, the Hoxha regime has been able to deal with opposition movements by instituting further repressive measures. For example, Shehu has organized special pursuit battalions which operate in the mountainous areas against individual resistance groups.

14. Refugees have reported the existence of various local rebel groups, such as the "National League of the Mountains," "Liberty," "Skanderbeg," ^{*/} "Call" and "National Unity", but specific information regarding these groups is lacking. There does not appear to be any established cooperation among the various dissident groups despite their common desire to rid Albania of the Hoxha regime.

15. Of the Albanian emigre resistance movements the Committee for a Free Albania, an affiliate of the National Committee for a Free Europe, with operational headquarters in Rome probably has most influence with the resistance groups within Albania. The Committee's activities within Albania have, of necessity, been limited to propaganda work and some subversive efforts by agents. Its most effective operation thus far has been the dropping of propaganda leaflets. These leaflets caused considerable excitement within the country, prompting an official note of protest to the Italian government, and encouraging numerous Albanians to flee

^{*/} The name of an Albanian hero of the 16th Century.

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Albania in the hope of joining the Committee in its struggle against the Hoxha regime. The Committee comprises three groups: (1) the National Agrarian Democratic Party/Balli Kombetar (National Front) whose following is strongest in southern Albania, (2) the Legality Party (pro-King Zog) which is strongest in central Albania, and (3) the League of Peasants and Villagers (Agrarian Party) which has the strongest following in the extreme north and in the neighboring Yugoslav provinces inhabited largely by Albanians.

16. In addition to the internal organizations and the Committee for a Free Albania, there are operating within Albania representatives of pro-Italian, pro-Yugoslav, and pro-Greek Albanian emigre groups. Their efforts are largely in pursuit of the objectives of Albania's three neighbors and therefore conflict despite the common opposition of all groups to the present regime. Their activities have been limited because of fear on the part of each country that a change in the Albanian regime might be to the benefit of one of the other neighbors, and, more important, because of fear that the Soviet Union might react militarily to any disorder in Albania.

17. The efforts of both the internal resistance groups and the emigre organizations are uncoordinated and their objectives

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frequently conflict. These factors have considerably simplified the task of Albanian security forces in isolating and destroying individual groups.

18. Under present circumstances, resistance activity constitutes a troublesome problem for the Hoxha regime, but is not an immediate threat to the regime. As long as the resistance effort is diffused and does not receive substantial external aid, the Albanian security forces will probably succeed in containing the problem.

CONFLICTING INTERESTS OF ITALY, YUGOSLAVIA AND GREECE

19. Albania has long been a bone of contention among its neighbors. Their interests conflict to such an extent that, even under present circumstances, the problem of Albania complicates the development of good relations and cooperation among Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece. Other problems of greater importance, such as Trieste and Macedonia, also militate against the development of cooperative defensive efforts, but these are beyond the scope of this paper.

Italian interests.

20. Italy's objective in Albania has always been to establish Albania as an Italian sphere of influence and to prevent any other

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power from gaining a foothold on the Adriatic from which Italian influence in the Adriatic could be challenged. In pursuit of this objective, Italy supported the creation of an independent Albania in 1912 and later, in 1914, occupied the island of Saseno and the port of Valona. Italian troops remained in occupation until 1920. Italy was then forced to evacuate the mainland, but retained Saseno which was converted into a strong naval and submarine base. In 1921, the Conference of Ambassadors (Great Britain, France, Italy and Japan) signed an agreement recognizing Italy's special interest in Albania. Italian influence was manifested by loans, Italian management of nearly all important economic enterprises, and Italian training and equipping of the armed forces. In 1939, Mussolini occupied Albania and united it with Italy, and in 1940, launched his invasion of Greece from there. Under the Italian Peace Treaty (1947), Italy recognized the independence of Albania, ceded Saseno Island, and renounced all public and private property rights, concessions, claims, etc. in Albania.

21. Italian policy towards Albania since the end of the war has been directed at a dual objective: the denial of the area to other powers and the restoration of Italian economic and political influence in Albania. In its official statements, the Italian Foreign Office has emphasized that continued Albanian independence and territorial integrity correspond with Italian interests, but

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Italian efforts to improve relations have made no progress with the present Communist regime. An Italian mission was sent to Albania soon after the war to examine questions of interest to both countries, but was soon asked to leave. Formal diplomatic relations were established in 1949 and, despite Communist restrictions on the Italian Legation in Tirana, Italy undoubtedly intends to retain such relations.

22. Under present circumstances, Italian policy is of necessity directed toward the future, and Italy hopes to re-establish its influence through the pro-Italian exile group, the National Independent Bloc. The leadership of this group cooperated with Italy before and during the war and enjoys the support of the present Italian government;

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23. Italy is particularly apprehensive of possible Yugoslav pre-eminence in Albania in the event the Hoxha regime should be overthrown. The Italian desire to avoid the establishment of a foothold by any other power in Albania is so strong that Italy probably prefers continuation of the status quo to the creation

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of a power vacuum which Yugoslavia and, possibly Greece, would be in a better position to fill.

Greek interests

24. Greek interests in Albania center around Greek claims to southern Albania (Northern Epirus), an area which the Greeks occupied from 1912 to 1916 and which they have consistently claimed on historical, ethnic, strategic and economic grounds. The Greeks also recall that Albania served as a base for the Italian attack on Greece in 1940 and, in the post war years, for guerrilla operations against Greece. Even at present, Albania is the major base from which Communist agents are infiltrated into Greece.

25. Greece, like Italy and Yugoslavia, is attempting to further its policy through the use of Albanian refugees. Those in Greece are primarily from southern Albania and are apparently concentrated in camps along the Albanian border. To date, their efforts have been largely in the field of espionage, propaganda and the encouragement of additional emigration. The Greek Government does not permit them to emigrate or to become Greek citizens. Some of those in the camp at Yannina are reported to be formed into military units, intended for eventual use in southern Albania.

26. The Greeks probably look on partition of Albania between Greece and Yugoslavia as the ideal solution to the problem. They

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are apprehensive of possible Yugoslav or Italian domination of the country, and would probably attempt to occupy Northern Epirus in the event of military action in the area, such as a Yugoslav invasion of Albania. For the present, in the absence of Allied assurances against possible Italian or Yugoslav domination of Albania, Greece probably prefers continuation of the status quo, at least so long as the Hoxha regime does not resume full scale support to the Greek guerrillas.

Yugoslav interests.

27. Yugoslavia, and before it Serbia and Montenegro, has always opposed the principle of an independent Albania. Following World War I, Yugoslavia occupied northern Albania and did not withdraw until 1921. In 1926, Yugoslavia finally accepted the Albanian frontier as delineated in 1913. Until the outbreak of World War II, Italian domination of Albania prevented Yugoslavia from exercising any influence.

28. This situation changed radically during World War II when Tito, through Albanian Communists, managed to obtain control of the Albanian National Liberation Movement. Tito's control was exercised largely through emissaries attached to the headquarters of the Albanian Army of National Liberation, and, from 1944 to 1948, Albania was a puppet of Yugoslavia. In 1948, Hoxha was able to

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extricate Albania from its ties with Yugoslavia because of the Tito-Cominform rift.

29. Since 1948, Tito has ostensibly championed the principle of an independent, sovereign Albania and has condemned Greek territorial claims and alleged Greek proposals for the partition of Albania between Greece and Yugoslavia. In the past several months, Yugoslav propaganda has also charged Italy with encouraging the plans of Albanian exiles for an "ethnic" Albania which would include the Yugoslav provinces of Kosovo and Metohiya, both populated chiefly by Albanians. Tito's actual intentions appear to be the eventual creation of an anti-Soviet, pro-Tito regime in Albania and a return to the status of 1944-1948. It was apparently to this end that the "League of Albanian Political Refugees in Yugoslavia" was formed in May 1951. The League, which claims to represent some 5,000 Albanian refugees, is composed largely of Albanian Communists who have fled from Albania since 1948, and was created by Belgrade as an instrument of Yugoslav policy, despite its proclaimed objective of "an independent, free, indivisible, democratic and republican" Albania. The League has already engaged in some espionage, sabotage and propaganda activity, and possesses a considerable potential for more extensive operations. Yugoslavia's exposed position, however, has probably deterred Tito from using the League to the full. Yugoslav spokesmen

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have expressed the fear that any substantial efforts to overthrow the Hoxha regime might be taken by the USSR as a pretext for military action against Yugoslavia.

THE POSSIBILITY OF A SETTLEMENT

30. The existence of Albania as a sovereign state has in the past always depended upon the attitude of stronger powers. Although all three of Albania's neighbors would presumably wish to see the eventual liquidation of the present regime in Albania, their interests are incompatible. The policy of each country since the geographic isolation of Albania from the Soviet orbit in 1948 has been directed at establishing a position from which it could profit in the event of the overthrow of the Hoxha regime. As a result, each country has been suspicious of the moves of the others and has sought to counter them. One result of this has been the diffusion of resistance efforts within Albania which has contributed greatly to their ineffectiveness. Rivalry among the three countries over Albania is also one of the factors limiting the desirable cooperation of these nations in the development of coordinated defense plans in this area. Furthermore, if the rivalry persists and if the Hoxha regime should fall, there would be danger of a clash among the rivals.

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31. The establishment of a liberated Albania as an independent and sovereign state, recognized by the great powers, would probably satisfy Italy and Yugoslavia. Because of its claims to "Northern Epirus" which would be thwarted in the event of Western recognition of a new Albanian regime, Greece would find it more difficult to agree to such a solution and would probably not do so unless Greek territorial claims were at least partially satisfied. Also, the Greeks would not countenance a pro-Italian or pro-Yugoslav regime and would, therefore, probably demand Allied assurances against Yugoslav and Italian aspirations in Albania.

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